

up, and lowering his body he met her, and in a trice the deed was done. Immediately, he was off her back and going away at a run, breast feathers again fluffed out and tail twitching. A second later he flew away.

I finally succeeded in photographing the Ringed Plover less than a week later; it was a case of 'third time lucky'. On the rocks and shingle at the edge of the Sind River at Woyil Bridge I took a series of pictures of the bird at its nest, all of which turned out well. After I had photographed the Ringed Plover I moved over to my circular hide which had been set up beside the nest of a Redwattled Lapwing. The lazy shikari had omitted to lace up the top of the hide, and as I had already spent five hours taking pictures, I too felt lazy, and so did nothing about it. I had been waiting only 10 minutes when there was suddenly a noise of flapping and a large bird landed on the top rim of my hide; I looked up at the same time as the bird looked in and it would be difficult to say who was the more surprised, because as the bird scuttled away it dropped something heavy with a thud into my lap. The Osprey flew off to a distant tree and looked back ruefully at my tent while I, rubbing the blood off my thigh, picked up a headless two-pound fish from the ground! After such a gift from the sky I decided to suspend further operations—it is well not to ask too much of good Fortune—and with my headless fish tucked underneath my arm I went back to my houseboat in great glee.

CATHAY CINEMA,  
SINGAPORE,  
October 2, 1956.

LOKE WAN-THO

## 12. THE DIMORPHIC EGRETS

It has become a common practice among modern systematic ornithologists to unite under the generic name *Demiegretta* Blyth a number of species and subspecies of dimorphic herons, which, apart from their polymorphic appearance (i.e., their individually variable coloration: slate grey, white or pied) and their partiality for a marine habitat, are rather widely different.

They represent at least two different types of birds, and I have already expressed the opinion (*L'Oiseau et la Rev. franc. d'Orn.*, 1949, pp. 10 *et seq.*) that the generic name *Demiegretta* ought to be restricted only to the typical species *D. sacra* (Gm.), the well-known Reef-Heron. Morphologically this species differs from the others now included in the same genus chiefly in the relative proportions of the tarsus and the bill, and also in the nature of the ornamental feathers.

But, besides this unquestionably distinct type of heron, the identity and validity of the other forms of dimorphic egrets erroneously associated with it [in fact much more closely allied to the Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta* (L.)], are more uncertain and have already been discussed in many papers. It is clear that only a close study of their biological relations comparatively with the Little Egret can afford some definite knowledge on the question.

When only skins or stuffed specimens are compared, it seems extremely difficult to differentiate *Egretta garzetta* from white specimens of *E. gularis* (Bosc), *E. asha* (Sykes) (= *E. schistacea*), and still more so from those of *E. dimorpha* Hart. The colour and the proportions of the legs and toes are the same in all of them, the plumage is identical, with the same seasonal changes of ornamental feathers, etc. As already pointed out by myself (loc. cit.), and more recently by Bannerman for the African birds (Birds of trop. W. Afr., VIII, 1951, p. 22), the colour of the bill seems to remain the only appreciable differentiating character (besides some slight differences in size), being black in the always white *E. garzetta* and also in *E. dimorpha*, both in its slate and white phases, against horny brown or even yellowish in *E. gularis* and *E. asha*, in their dark as well as white phases. *E. garzetta* and the white phase of *E. dimorpha* look practically one and the same bird.

Owing to some uncertainty still prevailing in the respective status of *E. garzetta* and the dimorphic egrets which, so close to it morphologically, are said to live in the same countries: *E. gularis* in West Africa, *E. asha* in the Red and Arabian Seas (including the West Coast of India), *E. dimorpha* in Madagascar and East Africa, it would be particularly desirable to study more closely their ecological relationships in the countries where they occur together. The coloured phases of these egrets seem to be found essentially, at least as breeding birds, along the sea-coasts of tropical and subtropical areas, spreading however to the interior in Madagascar and (? perhaps only as seasonal migrants) in West Africa.

In my opinion, these dimorphic egrets represent most probably nothing but local populations of the widely spread *E. garzetta*, adapted to a marine habitat and it seems hardly necessary to recall that their dimorphic character has long been proved by dark and white birds having been observed paired in the same colonies, and even dark and white chicks having been found in the same nest.

Finally there is another difference of generic value between the Reef-Heron *Demiegretta sacra* on the one hand, and the Little White Egret *Egretta garzetta* and its dimorphic allies on the other. In the Reef-Heron the white phase occurs only in the tropical zone of its habitat, the grey phase being the commoner over the rest of its habitat from Japan to New Zealand. The reverse is the case with the Little Egret: its white phase is by far the most widely spread, the grey phase being essentially restricted to the tropical zone.

We do hope that in India, where both *E. garzetta* and *E. asha* commonly occur in suitable places, probably not side by side, it will be possible to study the problem of their relationship more closely. In India, it seems generally believed that *E. garzetta* has more gregarious habits and that *E. asha* is seen more often as a solitary bird. But we must not forget that in the Red Sea<sup>1</sup> area this latter bird is known to breed in more or less extensive colonies of mixed

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<sup>1</sup> Also on the west coast of India.—Eds.

individuals, grey ones and white ones, and the same occurs in the very closely allied *E. gularis* along the coast of West Africa, colonies which are quite similar to those of the Little Egret.

MUSEUM NATIONAL D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE,  
RUE DE BUFFON, 55,  
PARIS, FRANCE,  
October 12, 1956.

J. BERLIOZ

### 13. BIRD NOTES FROM KUTCH

Maharajkumar Himmatsinhji of Kutch very kindly let me have records from his diary of interesting bird occurrences in Kutch over the last several years, showing how a place like Kutch, situated as it is across a major migration route can always have surprises in store for the regular bird-watcher. With his permission I reproduce some of his interesting observations together with a couple of my own during my visit there in April 1956.

#### **Indian Skimmer:** *Rhynchops albicollis*

August 1947 on the Laija Creek west of Mandvi: two birds observed on two subsequent days by M. K. First record for Kutch.

#### **Haircrested Drongo:** *Chibia hottentotta*

Seen by M. K. S. Himmatsinhji in January 1948 in the Vijay Villas gardens at Mandvi. Call note very distinct, and through binoculars, the hair-like crest very clearly noted. Tail forks rounded and a high sheen on the mantle. First record for Kutch and possibly for this part of India.

#### **Rednecked Phalarope:** *Lobipes lobatus*

Seen by M. K. on Devisar tank north of Bhuj in May 1948, and subsequently also in May 1949. Actively swimming around; and when disturbed, flying a little way to resettle on the water and commence feeding. Chestnut-red on sides of neck and white cheeks very conspicuous. First record for Kutch.

#### **Barn Owl:** *Tyto alba*

A live specimen shown at the exhibition held in Bhuj in April 1956. It had been caught at Talvana near Mandvi. This owl not met with in Kutch by Salim Ali, though it had been noted by Lester.

#### **Blackheaded Bunting:** *Emberiza melanocephala*

Noted by M. K. on 9 September and again on the 29th of the same month in 1950. It therefore is also an autumn passage migrant and, as Mr. Salim Ali mentions, a possible winter visitor. Seen by me in fair numbers on Pachham on 7 April 1956.

#### **Redwhiskered Bulbul:** *Otocompsa emeria*

Saw one bird in the Vijay Villas gardens on 11 April 1956. Fifteen of these birds had been released by M. K. S. Himmatsinhji at Mandvi in 1950, and they seem to be quite happy in the shady groves there.